

Lung fibrosis: Radiotherapy can cause scarring (fibrosis) of a small area of lung tissue, which can (rarely) cause some degree of breathlessness. If this happens please contact your GP or hospital doctor.

Bones: Radiotherapy can make bones brittle and more likely to break. With breast radiotherapy the bones at risk are your ribs. Rib fracture is very rare but is painful. A fracture usually heals without any treatment. You should speak to your doctor if you feel you have damaged a rib in some way or if your rib pain continues.

Heart: Radiotherapy to the left breast may affect a small amount of heart tissue and make you more susceptible to heart disease. Breast cancer radiotherapy increases the risk of heart disease by less than 2 %. If you experience any symptoms, please contact your nearest Emergency department.

Secondary malignancy: Radiotherapy is associated with a small risk of developing a second cancer many years later, as a result of the radiotherapy. The risk is usually less than 1 %.

How to contact us

If you have any queries during your radiotherapy, please speak to your doctor on your follow up day when you come in for treatment.

RADIOTHERAPY TO THE BREAST



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Information for Patients

This leaflet – Radiotherapy to the breast – will provide more specific detail about the type of treatment planned for you, including information on how you can help yourself during and after treatment.

After breast surgery there remains a small risk of a cancer returning in the breast. This can happen even if the surgeon has completely removed the cancer that can be seen and the edges around the cancer are clear. When radiotherapy is given, this risk is approximately halved.

What happens during the radiotherapy treatment?

During your radiotherapy appointment you will need to lie on a special piece of equipment called a breast board. This is used to help you remain still and be positioned in the same way each day for treatment. During the treatment you will need to remove your clothes from your top half. We will also need to mark your skin with small permanent tattoos. These are each the size of a full stop. These tattoos are used to place you in the correct position each time you have treatment.

Short Term Side Effects

Radiotherapy treatment is painless. However, it does have some side effects and you may notice one or more of them gradually developing over the course of treatment. Please note that it is rare to experience all of these side effects.

Skin: You are likely to experience some skin changes in the area being treated. This can vary from slight pinkness and itching (similar to mild burn), to quite marked redness and blistering. Severe skin reactions are uncommon. The doctor will assess your skin during treatment on the specified follow up day and provide creams if needed.

Tiredness: You may feel tired, especially toward the end of a course of treatment. You can continue working if you feel able to.

Pain: Occasionally breast can become swollen during treatment. You may also experience sharp shooting pains and twinges, which can be related to the re-growth of nerves. If this happens, the pain is usually minimal and can be treated with mild painkillers if needed.

Nausea (Feeling sick): It is very rare to experience nausea during this treatment, but if it happens it is usually mild.

Any side effect you experience during treatment will continue to worsen up to approximately two weeks after treatment. They then usually slowly settle during the following few weeks. Please do not worry as this is quite normal.

Possible Long Term Side Effects

Long term side effects (late effects) can occur months to years after radiotherapy. In most people, these effects are mild and do not interfere with everyday activities. However, a small proportion of people develop more marked effects which can be troublesome.

Breast changes: Some degree of breast shrinkage is expected. Your treated breast may become firmer to the touch compared to the other one.

Edema: Your breast may become swollen, tender, pinker in colour and warmer to touch, several months after treatment. This is known as breast edema. If this happens, continue using moisturizing cream on your breast every day.

Shoulder movement: Some restriction in the range of your shoulder movement may occur on the side which has been treated. You will be advised for helpful exercises.

Pain: Long term, persistent pain in the breast may occur.

Skin: You may notice dilated capillaries (tiny blood vessels) under your skin in the area that has been treated. These marks are called telangiectasia. They can look unpleasant but do not cause problems.